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## CUBA | No progress in investigation into attack on Pastor Columbie

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Local officials in Moa, Cuba have told the family of a Cuban pastor who was violently attacked and left for dead in early February that they have no suspects in the case. Pastor Reutilio Columbie continues to suffer from dizziness, intense nausea and vomiting.

The 41 year-old pastor of the Shalom Christian Center, a Pentecostal church in Moa, Cuba, was attacked by unknown assailants in the early hours of the morning on 6 February and left unconscious on the street. The pastor was on his way to file a complaint with regional authorities regarding the arbitrary confiscation of the church vehicle by local officials in late 2011. The only thing taken from him was the document proving Columbie's legal ownership of the vehicle.

Pastor Columbie told Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) last week that the attack has left him incapacitated, with memory and speech difficulties, near constant dizziness and nausea. As a result, he is unable to preach at his church and finds it impossible to travel outside of Moa. He has been advised to seek a consultation with a neurologist in Havana but is physically unable to make the 923km trip.

While Pastor Columbie reported that he had received a great deal of support from the community, he said the local authorities had remained intransigent on both the investigation into the attack and the confiscation of the church vehicle. He maintains that his purchase and ownership of the vehicle was legal and above board but is worried that with the disappearance of the key document this would now be virtually impossible to prove.

Local sources have expressed grave doubts about the impartiality of the investigation into the attack on Pastor Columbie, telling CSW that in order to conduct a credible investigation, the authorities would have to look beyond the civilian population to their own ranks.

Pastor Columbie and his family expressed gratitude for the support for the pastor in and outside of Cuba despite their disappointment with the authorities: "We don't understand why any of this has happened. Everything we did was legal."

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "CSW continues to call for a thorough investigation into the attack on Pastor Columbie and the return of the church's vehicle. If local authorities are unwilling or unable to fulfill their obligations, the regional or central government must ensure that those who attacked Pastor Columbie are brought to justice. We would also like to see the authorities address the larger legal situation which helped lead to this crime against Pastor Columbie and remove authority over all religious activities and property from the Office of Religious Affairs of the Communist Party. Religious activities and property should be regulated through the regular channels with proper recourse for appeal."

### Notes to Editors:

1. It is believed that the assault was the result of the pastor's decision to challenge the arbitrary confiscation of a church vehicle by the authorities. Pastor Columbie bought a truck from a local person five years ago and modified it to transport members of the Pentecostal church in Moa, Cuba. In

December 2011 it was confiscated by the authorities without warning or explanation and apparently returned to the original owner, who has family ties to an individual in the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. The Central Committee is the same entity which holds authority over all religious matters, including registration of church property and vehicles, through the Office of Religious Affairs.